THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHY THE GOSPEL OF JOHN CONTAINS NO ACCOUNT OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS? THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND THE LAST ONE TO BE WRITTEN MENTIONS NOTHING ABOUT WISE MEN, SHEPHERDS OR A STAR. WHEN I WAS A CHILD AND THRILLED TO THE BEAUTY OF THE BIRTH STORIES I WONDERED/AS A MATTER OF FACT I DIDN'T THINK MUCH OF JOHN FOR NOT INCLUDING THAT PRETTY STORY. I HAD VAGUE SUSPICIONS THAT PERHAPS HIS GOSPEL WASN'T QUITE AS IMPORTANT AS MATTHEW AND LUKE. LITTLE DID I KNOW THAT JOHN'S INTRODUCTION OF HIS GOSPEL, HIS CHRISTMAS STORY IS PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT NARRATIVE IN THE WHOLE BIBLE. LITTLE DID I KNOW THAT THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN CONTAINED AN AFFIRMATION INFINITELY DEEPER AND RICHER THAN ANYTHING MAN HAD EVER IMAGINED.

THE FIRST CHAPTER OR JOHN, THE SCRIPTURE FOR THIS MORNING, IS A CHRISTMAS STORY TOO. IT IS THE REAL MEAT UNDERNEATH THE STORIES OF SHEPHERDS AND WISEMEN. IT IS THE TRUE MEANING TO WHICH THESE STORIES POINT. IT IS THE VERY IMPORTANT DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED THAT FROSTY NIGHT IN BETHLEHEM A STABLE. JOHN'S NARRATIVE TELLS THE REASON THE WISEMEN TRAVELED SO FAR AND THE SHEPHERDS WERE SO ELATED.

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AT THIS POINT I WANT TO POINT OUT A PROBLEM THAT PLAGUES EVERY MINISTER, AND ESPECIALLY ONE STILL IN SCHOOL. THEOLOGY HAS A VOCABULARY OF ITS OWN JUST LIKE PHYSICS, CHEMISTRY OR ANY OTHER FIELD. NOT MANY HOUSEWIVES CAN DO AN ADEQUATE JOB WHEN ASKED TO EXPLAIN THE PRINCIPLE OF THE INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINE: NOT MANY OF US COULD UNDERSTAND A NUCLEAR PHYSIST EXPLAINING THE PRINCIPLE OF SPLITTING ATOMS. HE WOULD BE TALKING ANOTHER LANGUAGE, IT WOULD BE ALL GREEK TO MOST OF US. A MINISTER IS FACED WITH MUCH THE SAME DILEMMA, HE HAS SPENT YEARS LEARNING AND STUDYING THEOLOGY. HE CAN HANDLE A THEOLOGICAL VOCABULARY, HE HAS READ BOOKS AND BOOKS ON GRACE, REDEEMPTION, ATTONEMENT, BUT JUST LIKE THE PHYSICIST THIS VOCABULARY IS PRETTY MEANINGLESS OUTSIDE A UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. HE MUST CONSTANTLY BE SEARCHING FOR WAYS TO MAKE DEEP CONCEPTS HAVE MEANING, HE MUST BE LOOKING FOR NEW WORDS TO EXPLAIN AND ELABORATE ISSUES WITH WHICH HE IS FAMILIAR.

THIS IS MY TASK THIS MORNING--MY TEXT IS JOHN'S DESCRIPTION OF THE INCARNATION. IT CENTERS IN ONE PHRASE "THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH." YOU HAVE ALL HEARD IT OVER AND OVER AND YET I THINK IT IS FAIR TO DOUBT WHETHER IT ACTUALLY STIRS YOUR SOULS WHEN YOU HEAR IT. I THINK IT IS FAIR TO SAY THAT AS IT IS,

IN ITS PURE THEOLOGICAL TERMINOLOGY THE PHRASE "THE WORD MADE FLESH" IS MEANINGLESS TO MOST CHRISTIANS. I HOPE WE CAN LEAVE HERE THIS MORNING WITH A CLEARER CONCEPTION OF THIS ALL IMPORTANT STATEMENT. I HOPE WE WILL SEE HOW IMPERATIVE IT IS THAT WE UNDERSTAND IT, AT CHRISTMAS TIME.

when he wrote his gospel

PROBABLY THE GREATEST BARRIER TO UNDERSTANDING WHAT JOHN MEANT IS THE FACT THAT HE USED A WORD THAT CANNOT BE PROPERLY TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH. ANY OF YOU WHO REMEMBER YOUR DAYS IN GRAMMAR SCHOOL CAN PROBABLY ALSO RECALL THAT THERE ARE MANY WORDS IN LATIN THAT SIMPLY HAVE NO ENGLISH EQUIVALENT. EVERY LANGUAGE HAS ITS WORDS THAT ARE MEANINGFUL ONLY IN THEIR OWN CONTEXT. SOME ONE ONCE SAID "TO TRANSLATE IS TO BETRAY". THIS IS A PROBLEM THAT IS PREVALENT THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE AND ESPECIALLY HERE IN THE FIRST CHAPTER OF JOHN.

→ In the beginning Was the Logos

THE WORD IN QUESTION IS THE GREEK LOGOS. MEN HAVE TRANSLATED IT IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS, IN OUR VERSION OF THE N.T. IT IS WORD.

Logos can't be properly translated

TO US TODAY "WORD" HAS MANY DIFFERENT POSSIBLE MEANINGS. THERE IS A SPOKEN WORD, A WRITTEN WORD, YOU CAN WORD YOUR FEELINGS, YOU CAN SAY "HE SURE IS WORDY." RELIGIOUSLY WE THINK OF THE BIBLE AS THE WORD OF GOD, WE SAY MINISTERS PREACH THE WORD.

All this CONTRIBUTES TO OUR DIFFICULTY IN UNDERSTANDING WHAT JOHN MEANT WHEN HE SAID IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD.

The gospel of John was written later than the other three, PROBABLY AROUND THE BEGINNING OF THE SECOND CENTURY. IT WAS A TIME WHEN CHRISTIAN MEN BEGAN TO REALIZE THEY HAD TO EXPLAIN THEIR GOSPEL TO EVERY ONE--TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT WAYS. THAT JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH, THE SUFFERING SERVANT PROMISED BY ISAIAH The chosen one of the people of Israel DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING TO A GREEK WHO NEVER HEARD OF THE O.T./JOHN REALIZED THIS AND HE CAME UP WITH A TERM EVERYBODY KNEW - LOGOS.

LOGOS WAS A WORD WITH ITS ROOTS DEEP IN GREEK PHILOSPHY. LOGOS MEANT ULTIMATE WISDOM, LOGOS WAS THE TRUTH THAT ONLY THE VERY INTELLIGENT COULD Body of mystical SEE. BUT GRADUALLY THE TERM LOGOS FELL INTO COMMON USAGE, EVERYONE KNEW IT, EVERYONE USED IT. WHEN YOU USED THE TERM LOGOS IN GREECE EVERYONE KNEW WHAT YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT. Bandied about in shops - household term - When you said the logos was made Flesh - heads turned

TAKE OUR PHRASE H2O/ SUPPOSE 100 YRS. FROM NOW SCIENTISTS CHANGE THE NAMES OF ALL THE ELEMENTS/AND SUPPOSE 500 YRS. FROM NOW SOMEONE IS READING A 20th CENTURY NOVEL AND THEY COME ACROSS THE PHRASE "HOW ABOUT A GLASS OF H2O." THEY WILL HAVE TO GET OUT A HISTORY BOOK TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS MEANT.

THE POINT I'M TRYING TO MAKE IS THAT LOGOS WAS LOADED WITH MEANING IN FIRST CENTURY GREECE BUT NINETEEN HUNDRED YEARS LATER WE HAVE TROUBLE UNDERstanding it. — The Phrase the logos word made Flesh doesn't mean much so we must search for new ways of saying it.

HOW DO WE EXPRESS OURSELVES? HOW DO WE MAKE OTHERS UNDERSTAND OUR FEELINGS? WORDS. IT IS ONLY A SECOND OR SO AFTER BIRTH THAT A BABY BEGINS EXPRESSING ITSELF ~~AND~~ PRETTY GENERALLY WE SPEND A GREAT PORTION OF OUR LIFETIME EXPRESSING our Feelings IN SPEECHES, SERMONS, CONVERSATIONS, LETTERS, BOOKS ~~OUR FEELINGS~~ BY SOUNDS--OR WORDS. BY DEFINING WORD AS THE MEANS FOR SELF EXPRESSION WE ARE ON THE RIGHT TRACK IN PINNING DOWN THE MEANING OF THE INCARNATION. LET'S SUBSTITUTE 'SELFEXPRESSION' FOR WORD. or Logos

IN THE BEGINNING GOD HAD THE MEANS TO EXPRESS HIMSELF. IN HIS TRANSLATION OF THE NTT. J.B. PHILLIPS TRANSLATES LOGOS--SELFEXPRESSION--

(READ JOHN 1:1-6 J.B. Phillips).

2 "AT THE BEGINNING GOD EXPRESSED HIMSELF. THAT PERSONAL EXPRESSION, THAT WORD WAS WITH GOD AND WAS GOD, AND HE EXISTED WITH GOD FROM THE BEGINNING. ALL CREATION TOOK PLACE THROUGH HIM, AND NONE TOOK PLACE WITHOUT HIM. IN HIM APPEARED LIFE AND THIS LIFE WAS THE LIGHT OF MANKIND. THE LIGHT STILL SHINES IN THE DARKNESS AND THE DARKNESS HAS NEVER PUT IT OUT."

IN THIS STATEMENT JOHN IS MAKING A REMARKABLE AFFIRMATION ABOUT GOD. GOD HAS ALWAYS HAD MEANS TO EXPRESSHIMSELF, AND AT THE BEGINNING HE DID EXPRESS HIMSELF. HIS WORD, OR SELF EXPRESSION TOOK FORM IN THE CREATION OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. EVERYTHING THAT IS, IS A RESULT OF GOD EXPRESSING HIMSELF. IN CREATION GOD'S WORD TOOK MANY FORMS.

MEN EXPRESS THEMSELVES IN OTHER WAYS THAN WORDS. AN ARTIST EXPRESSES THE INTERMOST FEELINGS OF HIS SOUL ON CANVAS. A GREAT MUSCIAN POURS OUT HIS EXPERIENCE AND EMOTION IN A GREAT SYMPHONY. BOTH THE PICTURE AND THE PIECE OF MUSIC ARE SELF EXPRESSIONS, THEY ARE PART OF THE MEN WHO CREATED THEM.

God's Word or self expression was creation

THIS IS WHAT JOHN MEANS WHEN HE SAYS NOTHING WAS CREATED WITHOUT THE WORD. DOWN THROUGH THE YEARS, IN EVERY SECOND OF EVERY MINUTE GOD EXPRESSED HIMSELF IN THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD, IN THE POWER OF THE STORM AND IN HUMAN HISTORY. and especially in history of his suffering servant.

BUT FINALLY JOHN CRIES, GOD HAS EXPRESSED HIMSELF IN A MAN. GOD'S WORD OR SELF EXPRESSION, THIS TIME, HAS TAKEN FLESH. THIS WAS A BIG STATEMENT. THE LOGOS, ETERNAL WISDOM AND TRUTH ARE SEEN IN A MAN! JUST AS WE SEE THE ARTIST THROUGH THE PAINTING, SO WE SEE GOD THROUGH HIS SELF EXPRESSION, THROUGH THE CHRIST.

THIS SELF EXPRESSION OF GOD'S IS SO OUTRIGHT, SO PLAIN, SO VISIBLE FOR ALL TO SEE THAT JOHN COMPARES IT TO A LIGHT SHINING IN THE DARKNESS. WHILE BEFORE MEN HAD DOUBTS ABOUT GOD, THEY WERE IN THE DARKNESS, THE DARKNESS HAS BEEN DISPELLED. GOD HAS EXPRESSED HIMSELF SO PERFECTLY, SO CLEARLY, THAT WE CAN COMPARE IT TO A ~~XXXXX~~ BRIGHT LIGHT THAT PENETRATES EVERY CORNER OF A DARK ROOM. WE NEED NO LONGER GROPE IN THE SHADOWS FOR GOD, ALL WE MUST DO IS GAZE AT THE LIGHT THAT WAS THE CHRIST AND WE SEE HIM. HIS WORD WAS MADE FLESH!

OVER THE YEARS THE GLORY AND MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION HAVE, AT TIMES, BEEN LOST BY MEN WHO WERE TOO ANXIOUS TO EXPLAIN IT RATIONALLY, TO REDUCE IT TO AN EASY FORMULA. ON THE ONE HAND SOME HAVE DISCARDED THE INCARNATION SAYING THAT JESUS WAS JUST A VERY GOOD MAN. ETHICALLY AND MORALLY HE WAS THE BEST MAN THAT EVER LIVED, IN HIS LIFE HE WAS AN EXAMPLE OF GOD. BUT AS FAR AS HIM BEING THE WORD MADE FLESH, THAT'S GOING A BIT TOO FAR.

ON THE OTHER HAND CHRISTIANS OFT TIMES BECOME SO ELATED WITH THE INCRANATION THAT THEY FORGET THE GOD WHO WAS EXPRESSING HIMSELF IN THE CHRIST. IN GOSPEL SONGS AND IN SOME REVIVAL MEETINGS THE ENTIRE EMPHASIS IS ON JESUS, HE SAVES,

HE REDEEMS BY HIS BLOOD AND SO ON. WE MUST CONSTANTLY KEEP IN MIND THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST BECAUSE he is gods chosen self expression. In HIM THE LORD MADE HIMSELF KNOWN TO MANKIND ONCE AND FOR ALL. [IN JESUS CHRIST THE WORD OF GOD WAS MADEFLESH.] THIS IS THE CORE OF CHRISTIANITY, THIS IS SOMETHING WE MUST TRY TO COMPREHEND IF WE ARE TO CALL OURSELVES CHRISTIANS.

THE INCARNATION, THE WORD MADE FLESH, IS THE STARTING POINT IN CHRISTIANITY. IT IS THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE UPON WHICH ALL OTHERS ARE BUILT. JESUS SERMONS, TEACHINGS, HEALINGS, CRUCIFICION AND RESURRECTION ARE IMPORTANT ONLY IF WE REALIZE THAT HE WAS THE SELF EXPRESSION OF GOD.

AN ACCOMPALISHED MUSCIAN ALWAYS BEGINS PRACTICING BY PLAYING SIMPLE SCALES, BY RUNNING THROUGH THE FUNDAMENTALS, A POLISHED ATHLETE KEEPS IN TRAINING BY CONSTANTLY WORKING OVER THE FUNDAMENTALS OF HIS GAME.

THE SAME APPLIES TO CHRISTIANITY, WE MUST NEVER LOSE SIGHT OF THE FUNDAMENTALS FOR WITHOUT THEM THE REST OF OUR EFFORTS ARE MEANINGLESS.

JOHN'S IS A CHRISTMAS STORY TOO, IT IS A STORY OF A GOD THAT GAVE HIS ONLY

the most fundy
of all fundamentals

Love so great

BEGOTTEN SON, IT IS THE STORY OF A ~~GOD WHO LOVED MAN SO MUCH~~ THAT ~~HE~~ GOD

of God

REVEALED HIMSELF IN A MAN, IT IS THE STORY OF THE WORD ~~MADE~~ FLESH.

taking

THIS IS THE TRUE SIGNIFICANCE OF BETHLEHEM, THIS IS WHY THE WISEMEN TRAVELED SO FAR. AS WE MOVE CLOSER TO CHRISTMAS LET'S NOT FORGET, THAT WE ARE CELEBRATING GOD'S GREAT ACT. In ~~feeling~~ joyous about the Birth of a baby in Bethlehem we - are affirming that this baby was the word of God, - it was God expressing himself.

Our Christian Christmas celebration has to contend with many barriers - one of these is over emphasis of the ~~birth~~ story. (if we miss the boat when we get wrapped up in) about a tiny baby that was radiantly beautiful, about cattle that bowed and donkeys that talked. Santa Rudolph +so on

The birth narrative is an important Christian tradition - but what is more important is John's Christmas story. - what is of primary importance is the glorious news - that at this time God has acted as he never has before - this time in a man -. this self expression, his word have become flesh - He has made himself known in Jesus of Nazareth - the Christ.